

INSCRIPTIONS, FORESHADOWINGS

POEMS

Steven Frattali

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information please address The  
Banyan Press of Taipei, 101 Song  
Ling Rd., Hsinchu, Taiwan, ROC  
300.Email:  
[thebanyanpress@gmail.com](mailto:thebanyanpress@gmail.com)



## INSCRIPTIONS, FORESHADOWINGS

I

Illuminator, I can never  
Feel you  
Near me, I search  
For my renewal, yet in vain

Although I want to  
Know you, perhaps I sense  
That you are near me  
Now and then

You circulate  
And are a part  
Of the city  
Of men

Yet exist  
Elsewhere,  
Somewhere  
Where?

Sun above buildings, the  
Trees move  
With the wind

What moves

Inside of men,  
Inside of women,  
In the time below?

I am an exile  
Here in the city of men  
What can I be  
In the Heavenly  
City above?

## II

Illuminator, you  
Who elude me,  
Even best efforts  
As though

Chasing a shadow  
And yet you are,  
So it is  
Written, light

Come to me  
Where I am  
Here in the

Dark, myself

Or shall I  
Not ask? instead  
Merely stay  
Here, silent, and thinking

III

Light through  
The window  
Haunted with  
Shadow bars,

Illuminated  
Cloth of drapes,  
Palm fronds  
Of blinds

I see these  
Reminders,  
Reminders,  
Reminders

#### IV

Where there is light  
There is fire, or  
If there might not be,  
Then how, where?

In the sun  
There is fire,  
There is  
Infinite fire,

It burns for  
The world,  
Though the world  
Stays as it is

#### V

In the end  
There are  
Gaps, and a life  
Leaks away

In the end  
There is this,  
A ring  
Is pulled from a hand



And yet it  
Is written  
There is something  
And somewhere

## VI

Illuminator, inhabitant  
Of thought  
Beyond thinking  
Where thought cannot,

What cannot be  
Seen, deep in  
The eye itself,  
Blind spot of light,

Illuminator, extending  
Hands so purely  
Empty, shadows  
Of tree branches

Blown through  
By the wind

## VII

Spirit of holiness  
Set down your light  
Here to guide me,  
Here all around me,

Smallest of places  
Here, greatest  
Of light, here  
And now place and time

## VIII

I seek to help  
Those who  
Can't be as they  
Need to

Bringing them  
Loaves and fishes  
Not from myself  
But you

## IX

Steps in the darkness  
Nonetheless somehow  
Guided, not guided  
But unthought, unwilling,  
  
Almost, almost right

## X

Light on snow  
Faint blue with  
Shadows of trees,  
Dark leaves scattered

With branches  
Quite bare,  
Loud crows  
Alighting

Something perceived  
Not apparent  
But here,  
Growing silently

Through me  
As I stand here,  
Watching,  
Listening

## XI

Who has come  
Down from  
The light, scattering  
Radiance unseen,

Invisible,  
Insight unknowable,  
Dream bread  
Inedible?

Time reaches  
Out in  
A vortex  
Down the street

## XII

And so  
When the angel  
Announced  
Impossibility --

Radiant, golden,  
Eternal, unreal --  
The Word moved  
In dark strings,

Caught in them  
Out of tune,  
Silent, discordant,  
Ringing in veins of light

## XIII

Give to the poor  
Their bread  
That they need,  
The doctors

Must come  
To them,  
How else to  
Be human?

We,  
The observers,  
How else  
To live?

#### XIV

You the  
Observer,  
What do you  
See?

The man --  
Yes he is  
That --  
Standing and lost?

XV

Writers  
With fancy  
Speech --  
Confections,

Delusions

XVI

Sub-human scum,  
Scum  
And rabble --  
These are so many

Money, it  
Is money  
That flurries  
The mind's breath

As though  
The leaves  
Should blow  
The wind

XVII

I am the  
Lord of words  
What is  
Unspoken

Speaks now  
Through me  
What is unknowable,  
This I yet know

What is  
Unshowable,  
Unacknowledged,  
I show

XVIII

You have no coat,  
No hat and no  
Gloves, and  
It's freezing



Snow and  
Ice needles  
Blow slanted  
In sleet wind

Your eyebrows  
White, your face  
Red, your hands  
Raw and stiffened

You call to me  
From your place  
Near the bank's  
Overhang --

"Please sir,"  
Coming forward --  
"Please sir,  
Some spare change"

## XIX

In the  
Psychiatric  
Hospital  
There are

Those who  
Wait, fearing  
Their own  
Minds,

Their crumbling  
And porous  
Selves -- others  
Are moving

Through them,  
Appearing,  
Speaking,  
Warning

XX

We rest in  
The warm sun  
Of the hospital  
Compound

A plane  
Appears  
From the nowhere  
Out of bright infinite blue

Low above  
The buildings  
The shadow  
Of its wings

Across the  
Grass and up  
-- a cross  
Of shadow,

Of a machine,  
Flows, rippling,  
Climbing  
The sunlit wall

XXI

Illuminator, you work  
Within me now  
At every point  
Of my being erased

My glass  
Of slowing  
Effervescence,  
My evermore

Approximate  
Outline, a fading  
Silhouette  
On your bright white ground

XXII

Earliest morning,  
And I think  
Of the day  
Before it has come

Yet even

In the darkness  
Well before sunrise,  
From set stones

Of black marble --  
Horizon clouds  
Shot through with  
Injections

Of cornflower light,  
The day is already,  
The time is slipping by,  
Tasks mounting within

XXIII

Our tasks are so many --  
The others who  
Need what we have,  
If we have it,

If we have it to give  
This is our doubt,  
The narrow ledge  
That we walk

On one side  
Is a wall of  
Concrete and steel,  
Of money and law,

On the other,

Catastrophe of  
Historical failure, corruption --  
Aborted, useless, and erased

#### XXIV

My existence  
Unwritten by  
The others  
Who crowd me,

They who despise  
The type of self  
That I am,  
Although they don't know it --

Yet changes  
In motions, new cloud  
Patterns forming  
In the sky - look up!

Cautious, and wary,  
I walk beneath  
The radiant blue bowl --  
Watching, guessing,

With new aspirations

XXV

Leaves littered  
On the ground,  
Wet and rain-limp  
Yet still

With their veins,  
Treacherous, slippery  
At times, even  
Dangerous -

So many there are  
I think as I walk along,  
So many fallen leaves  
And the hazards they create

XXVI

A stone  
Long  
Ago was placed  
In my hand

Who did it and when?  
Impossible questions  
A candle lit in my mind  
And then

A fountain  
Opened in my hand



XXVII

Lying down  
To sleep  
At midnight,  
Sheave by sheave

Littered  
Beside me  
On the earth-  
Field

Like leaves  
Littered aside,  
Yet still more than leaves,  
Sheaves fallen

To enwrap me  
In equivocal shelter,  
An exhibited exposure  
All corn husks

And bright hair

XXVIII

And a gaping  
Nakedness  
Exposed, this  
Is my core --

Cells, elements,  
Mosaics perhaps  
Seeds of the future,  
Remnants of past

Transience -- was  
It growing at all  
Or withering? --  
There is none who can say

Light of the  
Bright moon, of autumn -- full  
And beacon-like --  
Burning me with questions

XXIX

Unknown and  
Dimly known,  
The opening  
Of Light

In the landscape  
Of the mind,  
The stealing  
Of soft radiance

So slowly through  
The self of  
Memories -- some  
Faint and others

The occult and  
Agonized and dark  
Yet just as any field  
Takes on opal frosts

At morning  
Or sun sparkling dew  
In the first  
Burnt chill of the winter,

So then this other too

XXX

In the end of  
Illusion there  
Is calmness  
And not peace

Calmness disturbed  
By the agitations  
Of the day,  
The weather

Of circumstance,  
The vileness  
Of humans and  
The darkness of their hearts

XXXI

Distorted teacher,  
You who cast abroad  
The bad seed of  
Your illness,

It is not seeds  
That you spread,  
It is powers  
And powers of powers,

Multiplied, multiplied,  
Beyond any walls  
Or curriculum, far  
Beyond yourself --

An evil far beyond your mere self  
And your mindless protocols

XXXII

Illuminator, I have  
The flaw written  
Down the length  
Of my character

Like lightning  
Splitting a tree  
Down through -- I  
Am the focal point

Which everything  
Must lean toward,  
I am the only  
Living creature on earth

XXXIII

I am not inclined  
To kneel down and  
Pray, I do not feel  
Like going to confession

These things,  
Although it might sound  
Arrogant, strike me  
As for fools,

Or otherwise  
For children,  
But I am neither  
Deep in ancestral dreams,

Far in the pillaged heart,  
Well into the vortex  
That the urban street  
Becomes, in the vivid

Trauma and terror  
Of the mugging or the rape,  
In the consultation with  
The homeless, the addicted,

The dysfunctional, the  
Insulted and the injured,  
I, like some others --  
This is where I'm found

XXXIV

Instructors, how many?  
Can the earth  
Know its own?  
Can mystical

Viaticum be changed  
To a word, a word  
Of many words, and  
Relationships come

Forward where miracle  
Had been? Yet Christ  
Did as much, his speech  
Gathering thousands,

His poor robes  
Promising little,  
His two hands  
Holding nothing



XXXV

Instructor, crucified,  
Your arms are  
Open wide, as though  
To embrace the world

And yet  
You cannot move,  
The world  
Is untouched

XXXVI

The teacher, scourged  
At a whipping post,  
Gouts of blood  
And strips of flesh

Torn off, and we,  
Below, bleed also,  
Tear our own flesh,  
Or have it torn by others

XXXVII

Radiant passion  
To fill the whole void  
Of earth, this is  
The advent gift,

This is the holy trace,  
This is the Lord  
Who lies hidden within  
The numinous gesture,

The eye quick with mercy  
Or the eyes closed in thought

XXXVIII

The gift of existence  
Overwhelms the existent,  
Fills, and fills further,  
Every point of its life,

Every organ of self  
And soul a virtual  
Sun, streaming outward  
And outward, profusion,

No limit, endless  
And infinite, beyond  
Any calculus, even though mortal,  
Yet still with no measure

And still with no end

XXXIX

Medicine for the mind,  
Advice for the body too --  
Power streams into  
The soul by these and yet

Other routes, for these  
Are the measured ways,  
Gradient, weighted,  
Yet our life has few markers,

And its substance is light

XL

You who are reading  
Me now must do so  
With forethought,  
With afterthought,

With meditative care  
You do not know  
What I'm saying,  
How can you?

You are you, and not I

XLI

The Lord, we are told,  
Protects drunks and fools  
I drink from the air  
And from the streaming light

I drink the cloud patterns  
As they change each instant  
I hold up to the wind  
Both my hands, though little  
arrives

XLII

I await the redemption  
From the kingdom of money,  
I await the renewal  
Of Being and of Time

How can it ever come?  
The torrential blood flow,  
The lies thickly tangled,  
The last occlusion of mind

XLIII

Instructor, the  
Lies then with  
Which they  
Encircled you,

The one signal  
Lie, but then  
Numerous others,  
Crowds instinct

With falsehood,  
As though  
Breathing it  
Out, the

Stench  
Of the human,  
Each person  
A crowd --

Swaying, clinging  
To the next,  
Scarcely able  
To stand

In vertiginous  
Delusion, mendacity  
Seething, staggering  
Weight of the unreal



## XLIV

The end of  
The culture  
Of greed  
And of delusion,

The end of the  
Regime  
Of torture  
And of money,

The advent  
Of justice,  
The coming  
Of mercy,

The appearance  
Of the teacher,  
The true one,  
The guide

XLV

Seething darkness  
Of non-space  
And no time  
Where thought has its end

Glimmering well  
Of night echoes  
Filled with stars,  
Absence of light

Itself light,  
No time and  
No speech to  
Grasp or to clarify

Active innumerable  
Unstable points  
Filling  
The uncontained

XLVI

Burning, elusive,  
The near empty  
Book of dreams,  
That these your life

Now all just  
Barely, barely remembered  
Here it was, and  
There, and then

And all the times  
In small fragments, brief  
Vaguest of images,  
Voices sometimes also

XLVII

You who have  
Guided me  
From there to here,  
You who shall

Guide me  
From here to tomorrow,  
Through the sand routes  
No footprints

Can last in, the  
Stone waste,  
The desert of  
The death sun

And the scorpion

XLVIII

What is my name?  
Is it written  
Here on the chart,  
The plastic band

On my wrist?  
Or is it  
Written in sand,  
Through the infinite sojourn?

XLIX

Hail fellowship  
Of holy earth!  
Holy and holiest Light,  
Your infinite

Onstreaming,  
Unceasing illumination,  
The endless  
Procession of skies

That you raise  
And fill out with  
The absolute splendor of

Clearing expanding space --

Openness opened now  
Of emptiness reborn, redeemed,  
The inexhaustible newness,  
Endless novelty of sight

L

Light wave or  
Light particle,  
The sovereignty  
Of light --

As in  
Lightning --  
Surpasses  
All substance

LI

Logos, your  
Being transcends  
Every being,  
The self that you are

Is filled bright  
With an emptiness  
Made splendid  
By sheerest ubiquity

LII

Sun above these rooftops  
And the day is  
Streaming atoms  
Of light, blinding

And white blue seas,  
My eyes are put out,  
And yet I walk along,  
Cinder of a man

Stricken, upright,  
Nevertheless feeling  
This elemental mind  
The radiant bright waves



LIII

You are the empty day  
Filled with infinite dreams,  
I move through it  
In hope and fear  
That they come true

On these two open hands  
Pour down strange substance --  
Light,  
Overwhelming and subtle influence  
Bringing both hope and fear

LIV

Radiant king, my sovereign,  
Light itself, you are  
The open secret, shelter me  
In the chaotic dark

I must come back  
From shedding every skin,  
Abandoning my shell  
Of nearly lived-in life

LV

Passing breezes gratifying  
To breathe, not to the eye  
--look for what can't be seen,  
Even not be found

Moving, stirring although  
Within this -- dim margin  
Set upon the living soul  
That it come close,

But yet not touch

LVI

Moths out at night,  
A fragile thing  
Made of paper,  
Feathers, silk

The open night  
Receives it,  
Unlimited and  
Always famished

LVII

Night lightning  
And the flash  
Breaks open  
What was sealed

If only  
It would last  
So that I might  
See into,

And see through

LVIII

I breathe and so  
I hope, and light  
Suffuses me, I fill  
With aspiration

I feel power,  
A perilous  
Insight comes,  
Uncertainty as well

What can be done,  
What ventured,  
And what said?  
Nothing, the voices

Crying  
In the wind  
Call out, crying  
They call out nothing

LIX

Illuminator, I  
Have sought  
For you, have I sought  
For you in vain?

Where do you exist?  
The sky rings  
With your power, a  
Light suffuses everything

The world burns  
In brightness,  
And every object shines  
As though with an inner light

LX

Instructor, crucified,  
You come forth  
From your cross,  
An emanation

From its darkness  
As though light  
Should come from shadow,  
As though life

Should come from death  
Redeemer, crucified  
Yet reigning  
From the gallows tree,

Your hands are nailed  
And yet you hold them out  
For all to come, for all  
To be embraced, to see



*Envoy*

There is a darkness  
Remaining inside  
The candle's light  
Often not seen

And yet it is there

There is an absence  
Inside the  
Shimmering flame  
It is not what it is

There is a doubt  
In the mind  
Of even believers at prayer  
A shadow falls over me

I am not what I am



## AFTERWORD

Encounters With the Author in  
Taipei

We first made the author's acquaintance at a well-known restaurant in Taipei, the Wysteria Tea House, famous as having been a meeting place for dissident intellectuals in the years of political struggle in Taiwan .

During the recent effort to publish his rather extensive work, we had occasion to discuss aspects of his past and current writing.

*Your poetry is quite varied in style and in form. Where do you locate yourself in the overall debate concerning poetic form?*

I consider myself an eclectic. The main thing for me is to grasp, mentally, a certain object -- that is, an experience, a scene, an event -- to see it and feel it. Any language that seems to convey the reality of that is good, any which remains merely language,

merely words, is for me of no interest, in some cases it is actively negative, in the sense of being obstructive.

*A cliché?*

Yes or not even a cliché but in a way worse than that. Much of our language obscures the nature of reality. Words in themselves are, in a sense, the enemy of writing. I tell students that all the time. Words most often merely convey the usual accepted social understanding. Writing is for the purpose of grasping reality itself, which is always something other than the social understanding.

*Do you consider yourself a political writer?*

All writing is political in the sense of attempting to correct these false social understandings. At times its purpose is to merely reveal with a new freshness, a perceptual freshness, as it were. But even this itself has a certain basic political significance, in the sense that awakened human beings will act and think differently than those who are at rest in the normal tranquilized

non-perception that we usually are caught up in.

*Does living outside the United States help or hinder your writing?*

I think it helps, in general. It is in some ways a very undeveloped culture, yet in other ways it is overbearing. (The US, that is.) There is, for example, a great deal of rather stifling political correctness, as it's called, and to get away from that is itself a positive thing. For a while I had no idea how I would ever get all this material published, especially if you're not there trying to do all the "networking" that is needed, and which I was absolutely terrible at anyway -- worse than terrible, I really had no clue, I still don't, I suppose. And then it came about that you could just do it all by yourself, by means of the internet.

*How much material is it? It's quite a lot, it would seem.*

Yes, I guess it's about 40 volumes or so. Over 2,000 pages, if you want to measure it like that. I don't know how much it would weigh.

*There seem to be many styles represented. Was that something you consciously strove for?*

Yes. I always wanted to be able to represent a wide variety of experiences. My first models for the artist were people such as Picasso, Goethe, Bach -- artists who could work in a very wide range of forms and even use widely different styles. Of course, I can't compare myself to people like that, but it was still a goal, to try many types of things.

*What sorts of things are you working on currently?*

Well as you know I am trying to get all this existing work published, going through it, touching it up here and there, proofreading, and so forth. After that, I think I might return to some translating work -- Holderlin especially, and some Chinese poets, but don't ask me which ones.

*All right, but can you say whether they are modern or classical?*

Classical. My favorite is Mung Hao-Ren, actually.

*What were you trying to do in  
these poems in particular?*

It was an attempt to use a  
somewhat plain almost anonymous  
style to express devotional  
themes, not necessarily in the  
voice of the author, but in a sort  
of collective voice, expressing  
things that many people feel.

## About the Author

Steven Frattali is an expatriate American writer living in Taipei. He is the author to date of over 40 volumes of poetry, totaling over 2,000 pages of work. He is also the author of several critical works, among them *Person, Place and World: A Late Modern Reading of Robert Frost* and *Hypodermic Light: The Poetry of Philip Lamantia and the Question of Surrealism*.

## About the Banyan Press of Taipei

The Banyan Press of Taipei was founded in 2008 by Samuel Palmer and Steven Frattali. It plans to publish the work of expatriate Anglophone writers of the Pacific Rim who are working outside the norms of mainstream publishing. The Press does not at this time invite submissions, but it hopes to do so in the future.



